



Media Release

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Arkansas Ranked Second in Access to Early Education

(Little Rock--) The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) released the 2008 State of Preschool Report naming The Arkansas Better Chance Program (ABC) second in the nation in access for 3-year-old children. The report ranks all 50 states on access, quality and state resources dedicated to preschool initiatives. Results of this year's review places Arkansas in an elite group of states that serve a more than 20 percent of children at age 3 in general and special education programs. Other states include Illinois, Vermont, and New Jersey.

"The success of Arkansas' early education system is the result of state and local partnerships dedicated to the development of children," said Tonya Russell, Director of DHS' Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. "It's especially important that during these difficult economic times, we preserve our Pre-K Delivery system. Data shows that investing in early education has a direct impact on families and communities including economic development and health."

According to the NIEER report, enrollment in state funded Pre-K programs has increased by more than 108,000 children. Since 2004, the ABC program has grown from 8,000 children to more than 25,000 in 2009.

"Stronger pre-K programs resonate throughout our education system," Governor Mike Beebe said.

"We are thankful for the national recognition, but will not rest on our laurels as we continue to better prepare our children to achieve throughout their educational lives."

In addition to the positive economic and health impact, research conducted by NIEER shows that a high-quality early education environment can improve the long-term educational outcomes significantly reducing other issues such as school drop-out rates, crime, and delinquency. For more information on the ABC program or other DHS services, please visit us on the web at www.arkansas.gov/dhs.

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